

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service
603 South Highway 86
Lakefield MN 56150-3295

Telephone: (507) 662-6682 Ext 3

April 11, 2005

Dear Landowner or Operator:

The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that the Blue Earth River Watershed (located in both Minnesota and Iowa) is one of the 220 watersheds to be included in the Conservation Security Program (CSP) in 2005. This watershed includes parts of Blue Earth, Cottonwood, Faribault, Freeborn, Jackson, Martin, and Watonwan counties in Minnesota; plus the Iowa counties of Emmet, Kossuth and Winnebago.

NRCS is contacting landowners/operators in the Blue Earth River Watershed to let them know that they may be eligible to apply for CSP during the sign-up period scheduled for April 11, 2005 to May 28, 2005. CSP is a tremendous opportunity for farmers who practice good soil and water conservation and are willing to do more. The purpose of CSP is to reward the best conservation farmers and motivate others to become good stewards of the land. Please review this information with your landlords.

This unique program, for those who meet the basic eligibility requirements, offers payments from five to ten year contracts. Farmers can assess whether their individual agricultural operation meets sign-up criteria and answer the question, "Do I address the minimum soil and water quality criteria on land that I manage for the Conservation Security Program?"

Please review the **Pre-Assessment Questions** on the backside of this letter. If you can answer "yes" or N/A to all of these questions, and plan to enroll in the program you are encouraged to attend the workshop. Interested producers are simply required to successfully complete a self-assessment workbook to determine on their own whether or not they are likely to be eligible for the program prior to setting up an appointment with NRCS to sign up for the program. Some of the key areas that will be required for acceptance into the Conservation Security Program are listed on the back of this letter.

If you would like to know if you would be eligible for CSP, you are encouraged to attend the CSP Assessment Workshops being held on April 21, 2005 from 9:30 A.M.-11:30 A.M. at the Multi-purpose room at Minnesota West Community and Technical College – Jackson Campus in Jackson, Minnesota. At the workshop you will receive a copy of the CSP Self Assessment Workbook and participate in a discussion on how to complete the Self Assessment Workbook, as well as learn more about the specifics of the CSP program for 2005.

If you are unable to attend this workshop, you should still consider completing the self-assessment and learn ways you can better protect the natural resources on your farm. Contact the local NRCS office to get a copy of the CSP Self-Assessment Workbook, or go to the website at www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Joel A Poppe
District Conservationist
Jackson County

Blue Earth River Watershed CSP Preliminary Checklist

Since you currently own/operate land in the Blue Earth River watershed, you could be eligible for the 2005 CSP. Eligibility hinges on treating soil and water quality to specific levels. It is likely you could potentially be eligible to participate in this program if you can answer “yes” to the following questions that apply to your operation or the part of your operation (cropland/pasture) that you wish to enroll.

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Do you share in the risk of producing crops or livestock on this operation? (Landowners that only use the CASH RENT option are not eligible for this program; however, the operator could still be eligible.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. If you have been a USDA program participant, is your land in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions of the 1985 Farm Bill? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. If you are a renter could you show in writing that you will have control of the land for the length of the contract (5 – 10 year contracts)? |

For at least a portion of land that is cropped:

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Have you been using some form of reduced tillage for a minimum of the past two years? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Are you following a nutrient management plan and applying nutrients according to University of Minnesota fertilizer recommendations? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Have you assessed the environmental risks of pesticide use and addressed any risks with appropriate measures? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. Are all areas of concentrated water flow stabilized with grassed waterways or terraces are present which have eliminated the need for grassed waterways? |

For at least a portion of land that is currently pastured:

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Are you following a grazing plan? |

For all land to be enrolled in CSP:

- | Yes | No | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. Do you have records, going back at least two years, that document and support the answers provided above? |

If you answered “yes” to all of these questions, and plan to enroll in the program, you are encouraged to attend the CSP Assessment Workshop being held on April 21, 2005 from 9:30 to 11:30 A.M. in the Multi-purpose room at Minnesota West Community and Technical College – Jackson Campus in Jackson, Minnesota. At the workshop you will receive a copy of the CSP Self Assessment Workbook and participate in a discussion on how to complete the Self Assessment Workbook, as well as learn more about the specifics of the CSP program for 2005.

If you have answered “no” to any of the questions, you should still consider completing the self-assessment in the next few months to help prepare for future sign-ups and learn ways you can better protect the natural resources on your farm. Contact the local NRCS office to get a copy of the CSP Self-Assessment Workbook or go to the website at www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp.